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ABSTRACT

Starting school is a milestone in a child's life. This booklet for New Zealand parents and caregivers offers guidelines for making the transition to school a positive experience. The topics discussed include: (1) selecting a school; (2) visiting the school; (3) enrolling children in school; (4) the initial adjustment; (5) clothes and schoolbags; (6) bilingual and immersion classes; (7) the curriculum; (8) classroom organization; (9) homework; (10) computers; and (11) food at school. Parents' viewpoints are shared through diary entries throughout the booklet which record their children's experiences with starting school. (Contains 12 references.) (Author/KB)

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STARTING SCHOOL

A guide for parents and caregivers

Margery Renwick

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Starting School

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

~ *Margery Renwick* ~

NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

WELLINGTON
1997

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PO Box 3237, Wellington

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Preface

This booklet is a revised version of an earlier guide for parents, *Going to School*, first published in 1978. The original booklet was based on responses from new entrant teachers, early childhood teachers, and parents, as part of a larger research project on children starting school. For this revised version, a national sample of junior school teachers suggested ways of bringing the first edition up to date. Parents, junior school teachers and early childhood teachers have also contributed through group discussions, and several parents have kept diaries of their child's experience. Extracts from these diaries appear throughout the booklet.

We would like to thank all those who took part for their help.

Starting School

Starting school is a milestone in a child's life. It's a big event for parents and caregivers too. What can you do to help your child settle into school quickly and happily?

The early years

This booklet is mainly about the few weeks before a child starts school. However, children's ability to settle into school is influenced by many things — especially the experiences they have had during the early years. Teachers believe it's important that children:

- Are accepted and loved
- Have had a wide range of stimulating experiences
- Have had plenty of opportunities to mix with other adults and children
- Have been talked to and read to
- Are used to expressing their ideas and having their views respected
- Are used to doing simple mathematical activities
- Have had a chance to practise physical activities, such as throwing, kicking, and catching balls
- Have been encouraged to be independent and responsible for themselves, and to accept the consequences of their own actions.

Most five-year-olds lucky enough to have this kind of background will feel good about themselves. They should take starting school in their stride.

There are some things you can do to help your child start school with confidence. Of course all parents, children, and teachers are different. So what is true for many will not be true for everyone.

Be positive

If you are positive, your child should feel relaxed about starting school. Make cheerful comments about school. Explain that school is an interesting place where there are lots of new things to learn. Say that you expect your child to be happy there and to make friends.

Talk about starting school in a matter-of-fact way. Try not to make too much of it. Some children get so 'hyped up' about starting school

that they become worried and fearful. Others become so excited that they can be disappointed.

Kevin, I would say, is generally unconcerned about starting school — but when he does remember he seems quite happy and has spells of great excitement about it.

Choosing a school

Most children go to the nearest state primary school. This has many advantages:

- The school is part of the community where you live
- Your children's friends are likely to live nearby
- Getting to and from school is simpler and quicker.

However, many parents, particularly in cities, visit a number of schools before deciding where to enrol their child. Parents choosing a school other than the neighbourhood school usually do so because there is something about the school's philosophy, programme, atmosphere, size or reputation which they prefer. But they may also choose a school for other reasons, for example:

- It is close to where a parent is working or studying
- It has an after-school programme.

If you do visit other schools, it's important to know what you're looking for. Having a choice of schools increases the complexity of starting school. It can be stressful if parents choose a school and then things don't go well.

There are various ways of finding out about local schools.

- If your child is at an **early childhood centre**, the teacher will probably have information about several schools in the neighbourhood. Some early childhood teachers run induction-to-school workshops. Others invite local principals to talk to groups of parents.
- The **Education Review Office** (ERO) visits schools regularly and their reports are available for parents. ERO has also put out a useful booklet for parents, *Choosing a School for a Five Year Old*. You should be able to get this through early childhood centres and schools.

- Most schools have a **brochure** for parents and extra information for parents of new entrants.
- You can **visit** the schools you are interested in. School principals and teachers are there to help you make a wise choice of the school best suited to meet the individual needs of your child. Principals and teachers are busy people, so make an appointment first.

Remember that a child will be 'new' at school for only a short time. So don't just look at the classes for new entrants. Check out the rest of the school as well. What is different or special about this particular school? Does it reflect our multicultural New Zealand society? Does it have a bilingual whānau? Does it make a feature of art or music?

All schools have a **charter and school policies** which outline the school's philosophy and programme. You can ask to see them. The school charter has to show how the school is going to achieve the National Education Goals. These include:

- The highest standards of achievement for all students
- Equality of educational opportunity
- A broad education through a balanced curriculum
- Success in learning for those with special needs
- Increased participation and success by Māori.

Integrated and independent schools

As well as state-funded primary schools, there are also integrated schools. Most of these are Catholic schools. They are now funded by the state, although the buildings and land are privately owned.

There are Catholic schools in most districts, but they usually have full rolls. They have the legal right to limit the enrolment of non-Catholic pupils, usually to between 5 percent and 10 percent of the school roll.

There are also independent or private schools which charge fees (although they also receive some state funding).

New Zealand state primary schools are secular and do not teach religion. Integrated schools and private schools may teach religion. In fact, the special character of these schools may mean that religion is part of the entire school day.

Enrolment policies

Usually parents are able to enrol children at the school they choose first. But if a primary school is becoming overcrowded or is very popular, it may have an enrolment scheme. (Most schools with enrolment schemes are in Auckland.) An enrolment scheme lists various criteria for enrolling children, for example:

- Living within a specific local area bounded by various streets
- Having brothers or sisters at the school
- Being enrolled before a set date.

Children visiting the school

When you have decided which school your child is going to attend, it's important that s/he visits it with you. If you live in the country, your child will probably already be used to visiting the school, perhaps for a playgroup or for community activities. If your child is not familiar with the school, you can introduce it to him/her in a number of different ways:

- Your early childhood teacher may arrange a visit with your child. If that is not possible, they will probably be able to help you arrange visits to nearby schools.
- Most schools have procedures for parents and children to make pre-entry visits. Check with your school well before starting day.
- The school may have set arrangements for visits by prospective parents and children: for example, a half morning or morning over several weeks, or a starting school afternoon.
- Parents are encouraged to visit the school with their child. Three visits may be suggested — two with a parent, and one by the child alone. After the first visit, teachers and parents may work out a suitable timetable together for the other visits.
- If three visits are made, it's helpful for your child if they are at different times of the day, including lunch time.
- Find out if there are any school functions you could attend with your child.
- Spend time with your child in the playground during the weekend.
- Make sure you check out the toilets. Automatically flushing urinals can be scary, and children may not like toilets that smell!

Parent's Diary: Tom

The week before school

The week before Tom started school, we were on holiday, which probably meant he didn't think so much about it as he would have done if we were at home.

Tom said one day 'You don't have to be scared at school, do you' and later 'It can be a fire at school but the teacher will take care of us.' I'm sure he was quite worried or thoughtful about starting school.

He went for three visits which I found good. He got to know the teacher and he also realised that he knew most of the children from kindy.

I don't feel like this is 'freedom' for me. I would like to get involved in the school and to know what's going on.

The first day

Tom was quite keen to go and didn't seem nervous. We both went with him and the principal took us to the classroom. His best friend from kindy was waiting for him and he said bye bye to us after a few minutes.

It felt strange and a bit lonely to go back home. I thought a lot about him during the day and drove past the school a couple of times even though I knew I wouldn't see him.

He apparently hurt himself and was pushed in his tummy during the lunch break. This made him upset and he was upset when I picked him up. But he seemed to forget about it as soon as we came home and he didn't even tell his dad about it, he only told him about the letters and numbers he learnt so I don't think it was a big deal for him.

I felt very sorry for him and also a bit upset and angry when the teacher told me to let her deal with things that happen at school. I felt a bit like it was not my child during school hours.

Rest of the week

Tom is happy to go every morning and doesn't seem to be that tired in the afternoon. He seems to be a bit extra restless during the night, he wakes up and goes to the toilet. He also has eczema, it has become worse during the week.

When I ask him what they have done during the day, he doesn't say a lot, 'A bit of everything.'

Tom is not overly keen to read his book at home and I think he just has had enough of learning after a day at school. To get him to 'read' or 'study' his words we have to play games and I sometimes feel that we put a bit too much pressure on them already. I don't care if they learn to read the first month or if it takes a couple of months. The important thing must be to get them to enjoy school and learning.

Getting to school

If you live close to the school, your child may be lucky enough to be able to walk. Walking is good exercise for children, and it's fun to explore the route to school. Before the first day at school, go over the route together, and make sure your child knows the safest places to cross the road.

Most schools have school traffic patrols. Some schools also have a roster of parents who meet children at various points and take them across the road. You might be able to help.

These days, few five-year-olds walk to school by themselves. You may be able to take turns with another parent to walk to and from school with the children. Or there may be older children in the family, or living nearby, who walk to school in a group. For safety reasons, five-year-olds should not ride bikes to school.

Talk to your child about the dangers of talking to adults they don't know, or getting into strange cars.

Using the car

Many parents and caregivers take and collect their children by car. There is so much traffic on the roads that many parents think it is unsafe for young children to walk to school. In smaller towns there may be no public transport. If you live in the country, you may car-pool with other parents.

Of course, taking children to school by car adds to the number of cars on the road, and creates its own problems. It's important to park safely and correctly outside or close to the school:

- Do not double park
- Take special care on wet days
- Train your children to wait patiently on the footpath and not rush out from the kerb
- Do not call over the road to your child or expect them to come across to meet you by themselves
- If parents and/or children have to cross the road, they should always use the crossing and school patrols
- Remember that children must wear seat belts.

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Using the bus

If children are going to school by bus, you'll need to talk to your child about this and make sure they know what to do. Going to school by bus can be a big thrill for children. It can also be upsetting. Buses can be overcrowded, noisy, and very tiring if children have to travel long distances.

Parents who travel on the bus with their children say they have found it quite a good way to get to know other parents at the school. If you are not travelling with your child, you should make sure s/he knows how to behave sensibly and safely on the bus.

Where there's a school bus, often a senior pupil is a bus monitor. One of her/his responsibilities will be to report problem behaviour. Five-year-olds can find travelling with a busload of older children daunting. Don't hesitate to talk to the teacher if you think your child is being teased or bullied. Make sure your child knows how to get off the bus safely:

- Always wait until the bus has moved off, and
- Never cross the road behind or in front of the bus.

It's a good idea to tell the teacher how your child is going to be coming and going from school.[1] Don't forget to let her know if things change.

Sam loves going to school — the feeling that he's grown up now, that he can go to school with his older brothers and sisters and walk across the pedestrian crossing with the school patrol on hand, calling a welcome to friends on the way. He's just keen to get there. I'm told he doesn't ever ask when home time is.

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1. The Land Transport Safety Authority has published an excellent leaflet about walking, driving and busing to school called *Starting School Safely*. The Authority has also produced a free video on the importance of child restraints, called *Buckle Them In*.

Food at school

Your child may be excited by having lunch at school and using a new lunchbox and drink bottle. There can also be problems. Here are some things you can do to help:

- Talk about when to eat. Children who are used to eating when they like, or 'grazing' all day, will have to learn to eat at set times, although they may be able to have their drink bottle in the classroom. This may be different from many early childhood centres, where 'rolling' morning tea is now common.
- Choose easy-to-eat, healthy foods.
- Make sure the lunch box and drink bottle are named.
- Make sure your child can open everything in his/her lunch easily: not just the lunch box, but also any other containers, yoghurt cartons, muesli bars, or sandwiches in glad wrap. Teachers may not be on call to help.
- Pack food for morning play and lunch time separately, and talk about what's what.
- Children may have to get up very early if both parents are working. They may also need a snack for when they get to school, so that they aren't hungry by the time school starts.
- Pack enough food, but not too much. Children can be overwhelmed by too much food.

It's tricky to know how much to send. She's a skinny wee thing and gets tired and scratchy if she hasn't had enough to eat.

- Talk to your child about eating before playing. Schools usually have a set time when all children must remain seated to eat their lunch, but the set time for eating may be quite short. This can be a problem for school beginners eager to play with new friends — more time eating may mean less time playing.
- Find out about lunchtime supervision. It is difficult for teachers in a big school to know which children have eaten all their lunch. If you are worried that your child is not eating his/her lunch, talk to the teacher.

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The main problem seems to be the lunch time. It seems too long to leave them without real supervision. The school room where she is organised she obviously loves, but she feels insecure when there are no teachers about at lunch time.... The only time she has eaten much is when she stayed inside with the teacher.

- Encourage your child to bring home uneaten lunch, so that you have a check on what s/he is eating.
- Some schools have lunch schemes where children can order their lunch at school. If you want your child to use a lunch scheme, make sure s/he knows what to do.

Clothes and schoolbags

Make sure your child can put on and take off school clothes easily. Velcro fasteners and zips are easier than buckles, buttons and laces, for your child and for the teacher — teachers spend a lot of time doing up and undoing children's laces! Double knots are not a good idea. It helps if your child is as independent as possible.

Children should have a sunhat and sunscreen lotion in the summer. Many schools have a Sun Sense policy. Slippers and gumboots are useful in winter. If your child does bring gumboots, a clothes peg is handy to fasten them together when s/he takes them off.

There are many look-alike clothes and bags. All clothes and bags should be named. This will save you, your child and the teacher a great deal of hassle. Don't forget hats, socks and underwear (everything comes off for swimming).

If your child cannot recognise his/her own name, try a colourful patch as well. It is important that children's names are written inside bags and clothing, so that they can't be read by strangers.

Some children don't like wearing 'strange' clothes. It can be helpful for a child to have some spare clothes, particularly undies, in their bag, in case of accidents or falling over in winter.

Children may have to move about the school quite a bit during the day. They may also go outside the school, for example, to the local

library. If you take your child to school by car, make sure s/he has suitable outdoor clothing. It's a nuisance for teachers if they want to take the children outside and no one has a jacket.

When you buy a schoolbag, make sure it's big enough and not too heavy. Children carry many things to and from school — lunch, swimming togs, library books.

Make sure your child can do up the bag. If they can't they are likely to lose things. Encourage your child to think sensibly about how to carry wet togs or muddy shoes.

Your child may wish to take other things to school. Most teachers discourage children from bringing toys and special possessions to school, because they are easily lost. Maybe Barbie should be left at home!

The bag has been packed and repacked, imaginary lunches have been eaten and both Bill and I have been 'teacher'. Her dolls (and, when she can be persuaded, her younger sister) have been lined up and 'read' to. Her whole life at the moment is geared up to the birthday party on Sunday and school on Monday.

A friend

One of the most important things in helping a child settle in quickly is for him/her to have a friend at school. Children starting at small rural schools are likely to know most of the children already. Yet they can also be lonely, because there may be no other children of their own age and size, and few children with the same physical skills to play with.

We live in a country township of five houses, pub and primary school. Joanne has visited the school fairly regularly — going to play in the grounds after school and taking over Peter's lunch and forgotten books — so she is familiar with her surroundings. She knows most of the children well, too. Unfortunately, Peter has occasionally mentioned fights and quarrels he has had with the older boys, and these have stuck in Joanne's mind, and she is a little anxious about the older children.

At larger schools, your child will probably meet up with old friends from their early childhood centre. However, a best friend from preschool may go to a different school, or be in a different room. Older brothers and sisters can also be in different blocks. This can be hard for a young child, and you'll need to talk about this with your child.

Teachers say that school beginners these days have good social skills. Most have learnt to mix with other children and usually make friends quite quickly, even when they know no one. Many teachers arrange for new children to have a 'buddy,' someone who'll show him/her the ropes. Encouraging your child to invite someone home to play helps to strengthen friendships.

Parent's Diary: Victoria

The week before school

Victoria's fifth birthday fell on the first weekend of the holidays. Despite this, and the fact that our one 'school visit' (which was attended by Victoria, my husband and myself, for a full morning) was over a month ago, Victoria does not seem daunted by the idea of school.

I make a point of driving past 'her school' often and we have walked to it and around it, so that she knows exactly where school is in relation to home (approximately three minute drive/15 minute walk).

I don't think probably she acknowledges what a big milestone it is for her, but it certainly is one for me — my first baby starting school. I feel confident that she will enjoy and adapt quickly to school — she is keen to learn and her own self confidence has increased noticeably in the last 6 months or so. On top of this she will be joining numerous friends from kindy.

I regret that I am unfamiliar with the New Zealand school system, having been brought up in UK.

From Victoria: Seems quietly excited, but perhaps mostly because we have been encouraging her to be excited. After all, she doesn't really know what lies ahead. We have talked about the fact that at school she will have to do the things the teacher asks her to do at a certain time, unlike kindy where she could do much what she wanted. Her reply: 'I know all that Mum.'

She knows who her teacher will be and talks about the other children she knows will be in her class.

She is looking forward to learning to read — one of her particular friends can read already — sometimes recently it has bothered her that she cannot read. I have encouraged her with reading but not pushed it as she quickly loses interest (am I tackling it the wrong way?).

It saddens me that the closest years of our lives perhaps are now over, and perhaps I should have tried to spend more time just with Victoria recently, though it is hard with two younger children. But we did have two special 'Victoria mornings' missing kindy last month while one of her sisters was at creche, which were valuable — to me!

The first day

Victoria woke early and came straight to our room. While I was dressing she stood/jumped on the bed chanting the name of her teacher-to-be endlessly and with great excitement. It took little to encourage her to dress herself in the clothes we had set out the night before (often a lengthy process of negotiation). Ready to go well ahead of time. Keen to help pack contents of lunchbox etc, and put it all in her school bag.

I took her to school where her teacher greeted her by name (which pleased me, as there were to be several new children starting and she had only met Victoria once). Soon the friends she knew already joined her. She clung to me momentarily when I said I was going to leave until one of her friends (familiar with school from two weeks' experience last term) wanted to show her something and she went off without a backwards glance.

I shed a couple of little tears leaving the school as my little one was launched into independence, but I knew she was going to be fine. The day passed surprisingly quickly for me, since the two other younger ones still needed all my attention.

We were all outside waiting at 3pm — Victoria emerged with her class and rushed to me with a big smile and full of excitement . . . Chatter, chatter, chatter — she had so much to tell me she couldn't concentrate on climbing into the car etc. When we were home Victoria declared 'I think school is fun; another boy thinks it's boring but I think it's fun.'

She 'read' her first school book to me again and again—'I can read!' she said — very proud. I realised the mistakes I had been making when I was trying to help her learn to read, but was very happy with the pride she felt in her achievement.

She couldn't wait to tell her father all about her day — in fact it was hard to stop her chattering about it all evening, and she wasn't remotely interested in her siblings who were pleased to see her.

Eventually managed to calm her down sufficiently to go to sleep quite some time after usual bedtime.

The rest of the first week

Up early again. Collected leaves for autumn leaves school project as soon as she was dressed as it had been too cold to do so previous afternoon. Keen again to get to school; again momentary hesitation and clinging when I was ready to depart, but quickly coaxed away by friends.

Emerged excitedly, as before at 3pm. Keen to read me her book immediately — I asked her not to get her books out while we were still in the car. So determined was she, she 'read' it to me anyway (book still in bag)! Still plenty of energy to run around after school. 'I love school' — comment for day.

At home, settled happily down to homework, without encouragement, independently drawing whatever she could think of beginning with 'L' (always at her happiest, drawing). Still full of excitement at bedtime.

Enthusiasm to get to school each morning continues (though perhaps less marked by Day 5). Beginning to learn the routine on arrival at school and seems to appreciate the little 'rituals.' Already happy to potter off with her friends before school starts, and leave me.

Days 3 and 4 post school — still sufficient energy at end of day to enjoy a good run around outside with siblings. Happy

to read school book afterwards (does not appreciate being picked up on the odd word she gets wrong (i.e., misremembers) but usually works it out if she can be pacified enough to give herself time to do so).

Needs refuelling food urgently after school. Still keen to tell me all about her school day but seems keen too for plenty of hugs and reassurance.

By Day 5 — beginning to look paler than usual, even before school, but still keen to get going.

End of day: energy totally sapped. Looks pale and drained. Bubbling excitement quelled, though not unhappy. But ready to go straight home and collapse in front of television.

'Off colour' in the weekend. Slight fever intermittently. Low on energy. Not of great concern — presumably due to exhaustion. By Sunday evening happy at thought of school again in the morning.

Weeks 2 and 3 — after-school behaviour appalling: defiant, difficult, rude, unco-operative, hard to please. Usually keen to read school book, but at times quickly frustrated and angry by words she cannot immediately identify. My reaction to this has tended to be unhelpfully negative — it has taken me slightly by surprise, and it is not a time of day when I react particularly calmly and sweetly to bad behaviour.

I assume it is a result of a combination of tiredness and reaction to conforming to school rules all day and every day. I hope and feel reasonably confident that things will settle down. Other parents have spoken of their child's similar reaction to school. I feel I want to know more of what is going on for her at school: whether she seems settled and is participating as expected etc. But I do not feel encouraged to talk to the teacher about this — there do not appear to be appropriate moments to do this at the beginning or end of the day.

School enrolment

Children in New Zealand usually start school on their fifth birthday. But they are not legally required to start school until they are six. Some parents consider delaying starting school if they think their child is not ready, but find it difficult to resist the social pressure to conform. Others decide to teach their children at home.

Most schools prefer to know in advance that a child is going to start school, so that they are prepared to welcome her/him and can have little things ready, such as named pegs for jackets and bags for reading books. Check with your school about their enrolment policy.

The manner of the teacher is wonderful. She had all his books and things ready for him when he arrived. She made him feel very important.

When you enrol your child, you will need to take your child's birth certificate or at least proof of birth, for example, a Plunket record. You are likely to be asked questions about a range of things.

— Health

The school needs to know whether your child has any illnesses, defects of speech, hearing or sight, any allergies. There will be a health card to fill in. It is a good idea for a child to have a medical check before s/he starts school, and you should see that s/he has had all the recommended inoculations. Under the Inoculation 2000 policy, the school is required to check that all school beginners born since January 1995 have an immunisation certificate. A copy of this certificate is in the *Well Child/Tamariki Ora Health Book* that is now given to the parent of every newborn child.

If you think your child has any hearing or sight defects, these should be checked. A public health nurse may do this during the first year of school. If not, you should arrange for your own nurse or doctor to do it. Speech/language therapists should be available through the school.

Dental health is important too. In New Zealand, school dental therapists provide a free service to pre-school children as well as primary school children. Regular use of these services is important. Problems with teeth can add to the worry of new entrants.

Immunisation Certificate

This certificate is required by the Health (Immunisation) Regulations 1995. It is to be shown when a child starts at an early childhood centre, kohanga reo or primary school.

Child's family name: _____

Child's first name: _____

Birth date: _____

Vaccinator to complete information on early childhood immunisations, according to the National Immunisation Schedule. If not confident about receipt of all doses required to be fully immunised, either give necessary dose(s) **or** record as 'not fully immunised'.

Fully immunised: ☐ **Not fully immunised:** ☐

If not fully immunised, tick boxes for diseases where either all doses of vaccine given, **or** laboratory proven infection/immunity:

Hepatitis B	Tetanus	Measles
Polio	Pertussis	Mumps
Diphtheria	Hib	Rubella

Vaccinator's declaration

I agree that this immunisation information is correct. I have explained what may happen if all immunisations are not given.

Signature: Date:

Practice Stamp, or name and address of vaccinator:

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If your child has to take regular medication during the school day, you will be welcome to come to the school to give it to your child yourself. If you want the teachers to do this, the school will probably get you to sign a consent form.

— Home background

This includes your child's place in the family, and the names of any sisters and brothers at school. Teachers will be interested in your ethnic background, particularly if English is a second language in your family. Teachers will also want to know if a child is being cared for by a caregiver or nanny. To ensure a child's safety, teachers also need to know about shared parenting and any special custody arrangements or restricted access.

— Contact phone numbers

These need to include work and home phone numbers for both parents, for caregivers, for the family doctor, and an emergency contact in case no one else can be contacted. It is important that this information is kept up-to-date.

The school will also ask you about:

- Personality — this covers any general behavioural characteristics and how your child gets on with other children and adults.
- Early childhood experience.
- Special interests and abilities — including language development, knowledge of colours and alphabet, and recognising own name.
- If Māori or any other language is spoken at home. If your child is bilingual, teachers need to know this.

The enrolment form will be added to as your child moves through the school. An example of one school's record form for school beginners is on the opposite page. The school may keep parents informed about their child's progress through a portfolio, with samples of their child's activities.

Most teachers feel that having information about a new child helps them to understand the child better, and therefore helps the child to settle in quickly. However, children react differently in different situations. Starting school can be a maturing experience, as children are challenged by new activities. A child's behaviour may change as a result. Some teachers feel they need to know about exceptional circumstances, but they also want to be free to form their own

Example

Anywhere School

JUNIOR SCHOOL ENTRY SURVEY

(To be completed by the end of the first month)

Name **Date** **Date of birth**

Early childhood experiences
Health and welfare
Observations
Oral language
Reading
Writing
Maths
Social

There is space for your child's self portrait on the reverse.

opinions about a child at school. However, the child is yours. If you want to tell the teacher anything you consider important, do so.

Teachers will look closely at your child's abilities during the first four to eight weeks. They do this so that they can build on the child's knowledge and experiences, and plan a programme to suit his or her needs. They also need to know about anything that may be a barrier to learning. Most schools use the School Entry Assessment testing package. It includes oral language, reading and mathematics. You might like to ask to see this package.

Children with special needs

Special education services are available for children with disabilities, or learning and behavioural difficulties. Parents of children with special education needs have the same rights as other parents to enrol their children at the school of their choice. If possible, children with physical or other disabilities are enrolled with children in ordinary classes. But they may also be enrolled in a special school or special classes attached to the school. If you need further information, the principal of the local primary school should be able to help you.

Out-of-school care

Many schools run out-of-school care programmes. This is important for parents who are employed or studying. Out-of-school programmes are often in school buildings, but they may be held in a local hall, or private home. Children are usually met by an adult and taken to the centre, but this is not always the case.

Charges vary. The quality of the programmes varies too. There are no national regulations covering out-of-school care. Parents should check them out, particularly if they are community programmes and are not attached to a school. Children will be tired after a long day at school, so it's important that they do not find after-school programmes stressful.

Staying on the first day

Some parents and children would like a parent, caregiver or other family member to stay for a while on the first day. This is something you might want to talk about with the teacher during a pre-entry visit. At the beginning of the year a lot of children may start at once and too

many adults in the classroom could be overwhelming. Later in the year, if your child is the only one starting that week, it may be easier.

Different children have different needs. Some children need to be encouraged to let their parents go. Some parents need to be encouraged to let their child go. Children who see starting school as their big day may want to assert their independence by going it alone.

Whether you are staying or not, make sure you arrive in plenty of time on the first day — at least 10 minutes before the bell. This should give your child time to unpack her/his bag and find friends before the bell goes. Most five-year-olds these days stay at school until 3pm, but some schools have a policy of finishing at 2pm for the first few weeks.

Once children have settled in, it's important that they don't come to school too early. Teachers need time to prepare for each day, uninterrupted. Arriving from 8.30am onwards seems to be fine for most schools.

From early childhood centre to school

When children turn five, most move from an early childhood service to school. There are many different kinds of early childhood services now, including playgroups, playcentres, state and private kindergartens, creches, child care centres, Kōhanga Reo, A'oga, The Correspondence School, Amata, Montessori and Rudolph Steiner.

These centres have many things in common, but they are based on different philosophies and run different programmes. This means that children starting school have different backgrounds of early childhood experiences. The main thing is that if they have been to some kind of early childhood service, they have got used to spending time away from home and being with other adults and children.

The age of starting school does not relate to any particular stage in a child's development. However, at five children are expected to adjust to the routines and rituals of school. For most these will include:

- Moving from an activity-based programme, where children chose most of their own activities, to a more teacher-directed day.
- Following more instructions.
- Doing more set activities at set times. Set tasks are expected to be completed.

- Spending more time inside the classroom, and not being able to move freely between inside and outside.
- Sitting still for longer periods of time.
- Having a day broken up into segments, with morning interval and lunch breaks.
- Having to wait for set times to eat.

Adjusting to new experiences is an important skill to learn. Most children adapt quickly enough. Others resist and take a little longer.

Steven woke today and said he didn't want to go back to 'bossy old school.'

Ben reacted against the general pressure of school — the over organisation and rushing about. He always liked things just nice and quiet and at his own pace.

Penny has complained consistently about being too hot in school — and then cold outside. She said today she felt like 'cooked bacon.'

Parent's Diary: Martin

The week before school

Up until four and a half, Martin didn't want to go to school at all. He has an older brother (10) who's not that fond of school and can be very negative about it. But he suddenly changed his mind. Lots of his kindy friends started school this term/last term which helped a lot. Martin has speech problems and won't talk to people much, outside his family. He will talk to other children, not adults. We had doubts about sending him to our local school because his older brother, who has attention deficit disorder (ADD), gave the school a hard time for the first four years. We didn't want Martin to be known as Charles's brother. Martin has not got ADD. We had lots of talks to the kindy and Special Education, and in the end we decided to go with the local school. Special Ed were great, they talked to the school teacher and principal and will do follow-up visits to ensure all goes well.

Martin started school after the first term holiday. We had three school visits. His kindy teacher took him once and that went well, although he didn't say much about it. I took him for a second visit and we stayed an hour. He took it all in but didn't say much. Our third visit was on a Friday and I left him for an hour and a half. He seemed fine. They had a fire engine visit and saw a fireman Sam video. I think he enjoyed it. He stayed and had morning tea with the other kids. At each visit we were given a book to read at home and a word to learn (A a, too, am, do). I thought starting school was going to work out well.

We had our two weeks holiday, he got chicken pox but started school on time. Over the holiday we practised our storywriting and reading and talked a lot about school.

I think he will adjust OK in time, but not talking much is going to make it hard. School will be more structured than kindy so Martin might find it hard to do things at certain

times. He will love the Arts and Crafts and outdoor things like PE.

I still have a two-year-old at home who will miss Martin and kindy but I guess I will have more time to spend just with him.

The first day

Martin was very restless overnight and wet the bed, something he hasn't done for years. He was up dressed, lunch packed and ready to go at 8am. He kept saying 'Hurry up, we'll be late!'

We arrived at the school office at 8.40 to hand in all our paperwork and the principal took us over to the New Entrant class. We knew all eight children. Another child we knew started that day as well. I was planning on leaving straight away. I'd talked about it with Martin — I had to take his little brother to creche. The teacher started asking us mums what day we could help. I said I could help out for an hour or so on Monday.

I left Martin to drop the little one off and he seemed fine. When I got back they were having a tour of the school. I then helped with story writing. Martin seemed a bit lost and wasn't comfortable with what he was doing. His drawing and printing were very erratic and he could do a lot better. He was very clingy.

We went outside for PE which he liked and then made some letters from playdough. They were doing hearing and vision tests that day so I stayed to be with Martin for that. I took him but he wouldn't co-operate at all. So they said they would try next time.

I tried leaving then but he clung to me so at playtime we walked around the playground. He played for a while in the fort. He wouldn't use the toilets even though I'm sure he needed to.

After play the school wanted to do some developmental tests. Drawing a picture of himself, copying letters, cutting and a circle etc. I went with him. He tried hard, however he is left-handed and had to use right-handed scissors. I handed him over to his teacher then. He was crying and very unhappy. He wanted me to stay. It was 11.20 and I knew he would be OK in a few minutes. I did however expect the phone to ring at any time.

I was waiting at 2pm. He came out clutching his homework book. His teacher said he settled down straight away when I left. He hadn't wanted to do his reading with the teacher and said 'No' and was told 'You don't say No at school when asked to do something.' Other than that she said everything was fine. He didn't say much to the teacher other than a few words.

I thought it was a bit much having hearing and sight tests and testing his skills all on his first day. He met five adults that first day at school, for Martin it was too much to cope with. A nice quiet week would have been better. On hindsight I shouldn't have stayed longer on that first day.

I thought the teacher was expecting a lot from the parents. I know they need 'mother helpers' but it came across as a command not a request.

The rest of the first week

Martin was keen to go back to school. Dressed, lunch packed ready to go very early. Again he didn't want me to leave and after ten minutes I handed him over to the teacher, he cried again. But she said he settled down OK after I had gone. He is very keen on learning his words and if I point them out in a book will tell me what word it is.

Same start next day, keen to go but didn't want mum to leave. He cried again but was OK after I'd gone. Seems to love it but hates me going.

Friday is Arts and Craft morning which he loved. But still he didn't want me to go and cried.

He talked a lot about what he made. Brought home a library book and a poem to learn.

Cried on Saturday morning because he couldn't go to school.

Was a lot better when I left on Monday, didn't cry but held the teacher's hand. He wet his pants again today, something he hasn't done for ages (not at all at kindy).

He won't use the school toilets much. I asked his big brother to take him at morning tea but he said no he didn't want to go. He does a quick dash into the toilet when I pick him up at 2pm.

I think he may have wanted to go but wouldn't ask the teacher (remember he doesn't talk to people much). Special Education say he is selectively mute and we should let him talk at his own pace.

In all I think the week went as about as well as I expected. I didn't get a lot done. I wouldn't be surprised if things pack up later on, when the school expects more from him (talking-wise) as he can be a handful when pushed. His school expects a lot from its students and they are pushed to do well right from the start. At our school children are expected to work very hard right from Day 1. I think they need a few weeks to adjust before starting to produce much work.

Homework is given every night. A book and a word to learn Monday-Thursday, Friday is a poem.

They are only five and school's a big place with lots of adjustments for us all.

three little ducks
came out of the

Classroom organisation

Most five-year-olds starting school will go into a separate room with their own age group. But the way classrooms are organised does depend on school size and policy. Your child may start in a room with a mixed age group, or in an open plan area. Your child may also be taught by more than one teacher.

Because children start school individually on their fifth birthday, rather than in groups, their progress and movement through the junior school (the first three years) can appear confusing to parents. Children's class levels are described in terms of years, so they move through Year 1, 2 and 3. But within each year, ages can range by up to 12 months.

Classes will include children of different levels of attainment. So it's important not to try to compare one child with another. The school principal will be able to explain the school policy.[2]

Bilingual and immersion classes

Most five year olds start school in English-speaking classes. However, some children have had their preschool experience in learning using the Māori language (in a Kōhanga Reo) or the Samoan Language (in a Samoan Early Childhood Language Group). Parents may wish for this to continue at primary school. Schools vary greatly in their ability to provide bilingual or immersion classes for such children. The programmes provided also vary according to the resources available, including teacher resources. Parents are advised to find out about such programmes well in advance of school enrolment if they are considering this option for their children.

Children starting school from a Kōhanga Reo may have to get used to a very different environment in the classroom. It will help if s/he has plenty of whānau support. Perhaps brothers and sisters as well as other family members may want to spend time in the classroom with the school beginner to help him/her settle in. Talk to the teacher if you think your child will need extra support.

2. For a more detailed account of how primary school classrooms are organised see Harris M. (1986) *New Zealand Parents' Guide to Primary School*.

Teaching and learning

Before they start school, children have been used to learning through looking, listening, talking, and doing. Junior school teachers are encouraged to continue to build on these experiences, by running programmes which acknowledge that children:

- Enter school with different levels of knowledge
- Learn at their own pace
- Learn best when they are actively involved
- Need to talk about their experiences, interests and problems
- Need experiences which are enjoyable, mean something to them, and motivate them to continue learning
- Need to be allowed to make mistakes and not be too frightened to try new things.
- Should have responsibility for initiating some of the learning, and the situations in which it takes place.

New Zealand teachers pride themselves on focusing on individual learners, so most teaching is done in small groups. But teachers recognise that no one approach or grouping is suitable for all children, or for any one child all the time.

Children can react well to their teacher for a whole range of reasons, which vary as much as the children themselves. Perhaps the teacher always says good morning and listens when the children talk to her. Perhaps she laughs a lot, or plays the guitar, or is young and has nice clothes. The teacher may be a man 'like Dad,' or just happen to 'wear glasses like mum.' Attractive classrooms are important too. New Zealand junior schoolrooms are colourful, lively places to be.

I like the teacher because I just do. She gets mad with other children, but not with me. And we went to the park.

I like everything about school, even my teacher. The 'baddest' bit is my teacher telling me to stop sucking my thumb and I really like it.

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Parent's Diary: Catherine

The week before school

Catherine said school would be 'spooky' and that she wanted to be dropped off and picked up by her mummy or daddy the first few days (rather than our nanny who looks after the kids three days a week). Tess reminded her that she would be in the block next door when she started school.

School visit: Catherine settled quickly, aided by the fact that her good friend Johanna was there on her first day at school. She enjoyed printing and singing and making autumn leaves and was quite happy when I went outside with Max — in fact I don't think she noticed I was gone. Asked later what she thought of the visit she said 'good' very enthusiastically.

Catherine didn't talk about school much next day. She did tell Paul (her father) that 'some of the kids at kindy don't believe I'm old enough to go to school.'

Thursday: Catherine asked how many more days till school then said she was scared because she would be on her own — mummy and daddy couldn't stay, like they did on school visits.

School visit this afternoon — by comparison with her first school visit, Catherine settled much more quickly and was far less shy, although she did cling to me (her dad) for most of the one and a half hours we were there. Very keen to show me her tote-tray, and peg in the cloakroom. Her friend Mary came immediately to sit with her when we arrived, and at the end, Catherine sat in the body of the class to hear a story. Catherine seems to me to be quite hyped up about starting school, a bit apprehensive and a bit unsettled, but generally positive and excited about it. Her caregiver (Sarah) says Catherine talks about school a lot. She wants a new schoolbag.

Sunday: Catherine's birthday party . . . the final countdown begins. Catherine is very excited, both about her party and about the prospect of her last day at kindy, and starting school. She is proud of 'knowing lots of things' and looking forward to learning more. 'Soon you won't have to write everything down for me because I'll be able to do it myself.'

Monday: Catherine enjoyed her last day at kindy, making her hat and playdough cake, and sitting up in the special chair. She even manages to answer the questions such as 'What school are you going to?' and 'Who will be there (from kindy)?' — quite an achievement given how stage-struck she can get. Paul and I were both fairly unsentimental about the whole thing — as second-timers, and knowing that we have another kindy farewell to go through yet, it's hard to feel too nostalgic. I'm looking forward to Catherine starting school, largely because she is really ready to start learning new things and be extended. After much anticipation (for most of this year) the day is now almost upon us!

By coincidence, she wore the same dress Tina wore on her last day at kindy, provoking much speculation along the lines of: 'maybe Martin should wear it too,' or 'perhaps everyone should wear this dress on their last kindy day.'

The first day

Catherine decided to walk to school with Tina and Rachel (our neighbour, aged nine). I'd told them the story of my first day at school last night, and how I went on my own, with my older brother and wouldn't let my mother come with me. This obviously struck a chord, and they set off at 8.25 looking very pleased with themselves. When I arrived at school at 8.55 Catherine was busy doing aerobics with the rest of the junior block and didn't notice me. She gave some 'news' — her new Melody doll (part of the Barbie stable I'm afraid) and told the new entrants group about her party. She waved me goodbye as she set off to the school office with Johanna and Walter to fetch another exercise book. So much for clingy Catherine! I felt slightly tearful but had to rush off to work.

I thought about Catherine during the day, and wondered how she was going. Fine, as it turned out. Her teacher said she was a bit weepy at about 2pm, but joined in discussions, put her hand up and worked out what to do by looking at what the other kids were doing. She started to read me her reading book before we even left the school grounds, and has read it several more times since. She and Tina have had a very happy afternoon and evening — the day has obviously been a rite of passage for both of them. Tina says she went to see how Catherine was at playtime and lunchtime. Catherine ate most of her lunch at playtime, but was persuaded to save her apple for lunch. Tess took her a peanut butter sandwich at lunchtime but she didn't want it.

When Paul got home the first thing Catherine said was 'where's my reading book?' She ran down the hall with it saying 'I can do my own reading' and read it to P.

The rest of the first week

Catherine slept a wee bit later than usual and seemed a little bit out of sorts about the comparative level of 'bustle' required to get out the door in time. However, she turned down an offer to walk to school with me (her Dad) in favour of a ride in the neighbours' new car. Tess is getting sick of all the attention and praise Catherine is getting. Catherine wondered what tonight's reading book would be.

I left work early to meet Catherine after school. Our caregiver came up with Max and Catherine was cross to see her. 'I'm not used to school yet' she said, meaning she wasn't ready to be picked up by anyone else. She read Paul her reading book over the phone.

Thursday: Catherine and Tina got up early enough not to be in a rush and Catherine was keen again to walk to school with the big girls, and had identified that she needed to wear something warm because she'd been cold on Wednesday. I will keep offering to take her to school in case she decides the excitement of walking is wearing off (for a few days

anyway). After school, she was good about meeting the caregiver (we talked about it at breakfast) and again was keen to read her book. Seemed worried when she realised she hadn't read it to me (her Dad) as well as Rebecca.

Friday: Catherine walked with the big girls again. She told me that Shaun (her teacher) wouldn't be there today, but that they would sit on the mat with Mrs Bowen's class (Year 1 kids). Catherine assured me that they would not be getting a relieving teacher. 'They're not getting another teacher this time,' she said very knowledgeably.

My child enjoys the room itself. It's full of interesting books, displays and posters, including posters telling a story round the wall.

The curriculum

As you would expect, you'll find the school curriculum has changed since you were at school. The official policy for teaching, learning, and assessment in New Zealand schools is called the New Zealand Curriculum. It includes seven essential learning areas. These are:

- Language and languages (this includes reading, writing, and oral language)
- Mathematics
- Science
- Technology
- Social sciences
- The arts
- Health and physical wellbeing.

The New Zealand Curriculum also specifies eight groupings of essential skills to be developed by children. These are:

- Communication skills
- Numeracy skills
- Information skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Self-management and competitive skills
- Social and co-operative skills
- Physical skills
- Work and study skills.

Attitudes and values, along with knowledge and skills, are an integral part of the New Zealand curriculum. The curriculum supports commonly held values, including:

- Honesty
- Reliability
- Respect for others
- Respect for the law

- Tolerance (rangimārie)
- Fairness
- Caring or compassion (aroha)
- Non-sexism
- Non-racism.

There is a published curriculum statement for each of the seven learning areas from which teachers prepare their learning programmes. Each school is required to have a 'balanced' or 'whole' curriculum. While the same curriculum covers all schools, local schools have flexibility about how to interpret it.

This may all sound a bit daunting. Most schools hold meetings for parents to help them get to know what's going on in schools, and how you can best support your child.

Reading

According to teachers and parents, if children are asked why they are going to school, the chances are they'll say, 'to learn to read.' Not only do most children expect to learn to read when they go to school, but many of them expect do so immediately, even on their first day. Children can be disappointed when learning is not instant.

Teachers realise how keen many children are to learn to read, and they usually send a reading book home on a child's first day. If your child does bring a book home, s/he'll probably want to share it with you or other members of the family. Older brothers and sisters can be a big help. Talk to your child about the pictures in the book, but don't expect him/her to be able to recognise the words.

Modern school reading books are well illustrated with only a few words. They are enjoyable, and it's easy for most children to have success. However, teaching reading is a complex process. Many schools include something in their enrolment packs about how parents and caregivers can help with reading. The main things are that you:

- Enjoy books together
- Read to your child regularly
- Talk about what you read
- Praise your child's efforts
- At this stage, don't be anxious about what s/he can't do. Children learn at different rates. Try not to compare your child with others.

If your child speaks another language, try to get easy readers in his/her own language as well.

The school should also have copies of the pamphlet *Reading at Home and at School*. This is written especially for parents, and is an excellent guide. There is also a pamphlet about beginning school mathematics. Ask the teacher if you would like to see them.

Homework

Some parents would like children to have regular homework. You will need to check out the school policy. School beginners are not likely to have regular homework, apart from the reading book to share with you. If children have worked hard all day, it's important that they have plenty of time to do things with their families at home. But little tasks that help to build links between home and school can be helpful. An example of one school's homework sheet is on the opposite page .

Computers

Children often have access to a computer from the time they start school. But they are likely to have to take turns, according to a timetable.

What should your child be able to do?

Parents sometimes wonder if there are any particular skills a child should have learnt before starting school. Should s/he have learnt to count, or to recognise the letters of the alphabet? Some children will learn these things before they go to school. A few will even learn to read.

But all children are different, and teachers are trained to deal with new entrants as they are when they start school, no matter what skills they have already. As one teacher commented:

A teacher must find out where the child is at and work from there. She must accept the child as s/he is — not as some theoretical school starter. She must respect the child and let her/him know that s/he is part of her class. That is how children adjust readily to school.

Teachers are likely to stress that the main thing is a child's attitude to new experiences. What's most important is that children come to school curious and interested in the world around them. They need to be keen to learn, prepared to 'have a go,' to take risks, to accept challenges, to ask and answer questions, to share ideas. They need to know that making mistakes is an important part of learning.

Anywhere School

JUNIOR DEPARTMENT ROOM 1A

Dear Parents

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION NEWS UPDATE

Welcome to the new children who are joining us this term. We are beginning the last term of the school year by studying **Dinosaurs** and would welcome any books or information that the children might like to share with the class.

Over the nest three weeks we will be looking at Measurement as part of the **Mathematics** programme. This involves measuring length, height, weight and volume.

It would be very helpful to your child's understanding if you talked about these concepts at home.

Some ideas could be:

Look for tall things, heavy things, big things, small things etc.

Talk about measuring things with hands, arms, feet etc.

Thank you for your support

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We were talking about moving from 'kindy' to school and Dean asked, 'Why do we go to school — what for?' I told him about these special skills we need to learn and some time later he said 'but what if I just can't learn?' I felt really sorry for him and since then I have illustrated through various things he does — recognising his name and other letters as the beginning of reading, and being able to draw circles and crosses as the beginning of printing, to build up his confidence in this respect.

The most helpful skills children can have when they start school are:

- Going to the toilet by themselves, washing their hands, blowing their noses, and managing their own clothes, including taking off or putting on extra clothes, depending on how hot or cold they are.
- Being used to tidying up after themselves and looking after their own belongings, including putting their own lunchbox and drink bottles away, putting rubbish in the bin, and hanging up bags. In some schools, children will need to learn which rubbish goes into recycling bins.
- Knowing how to use pencils and scissors.
- Having an awareness of colours, letters, and numbers. Having a knowledge of books.
- Recognising their name. If you teach your child how to write his/her name, teachers prefer the name to be in printing like this:

  Susan Jones

  and not in capitals. Some handwritten letters may have changed since you were at school. The preferred form now used nationally is on the opposite page. Note particularly the capital 'J' and small 'k'.
- Having basic physical skills, such as throwing and catching a ball.

Don't panic if your child can't do some of these things at first. There's plenty of time. Six months or a year will make all the difference.

Most children starting school do have a wide range of the skills that teachers say they find helpful. A recent New Zealand study[3] showed that most children starting school:

- Were confident in communicating with others

3. Wylie, C. (1986) *Five years old and competent*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington.

BEGINNING POINTS AND DIRECTIONS OF MOVEMENT

Lower case letters

UPPER CASE LETTERS

From Teaching Handwriting. Supplement to the Syllabus Language in the Primary School. English Department of Education 1985.

- Could play peacefully with their schoolmates, most of the time
- Could look after their own dressing and toileting
- Could solve problems in their exploration, games, and construction activities
- Were familiar with books, and knew how they should be read — although only a few children were actually reading at this age
- Were familiar with numbers up to 10.

Around half the children:

- Could recognise the letters of their own name, and write their first name
- Could bounce and catch a ball, and keep their balance while hopping.

Just under half could recognise a range of different shapes. Many children could to pick up small objects, and lace cards. But very few could cut out shapes accurately, or trace around them.

Settling in and attending regularly

Most children take going to school in their stride, but there may be a few problems at the beginning. A common pattern is for a child to go off to school enthusiastically for the first few days and then to be less keen. Maybe a child has had too great a build-up about going to school, and is then disappointed. Once the first excitement has worn off, many children find it hard to accept that they are expected to go to school all day and every day, five days a week. One child said,

I've been to school. I think I'll get a job now.

Children's behaviour at home may change when they start school. They may be well behaved at school and 'rotten' at home. They may react to the morning rush of everybody having to get out of the house on time, particularly if both parents are working.

Starting school is tiring for a five-year-old. Your child will need plenty of sleep for the first few weeks. You may feel that your child should take the odd day off. You should discuss this with your child's teacher. But it is really important that children attend school regularly.

Children are expected to be at school by nine o'clock. This may be different from their early childhood centre where hours of attendance are more flexible.

For your child's safety, teachers need to know if a child is not going to be at school. Some schools have a policy of ringing parents or caregivers if a child is not at school each morning.

If you are going to pick up your child after school please be prompt or let the school know if your are going to be late. Children need to be clear about where they are going after school each day. They can be confused if the arrangements change too often.

Settling in to school is likely to be easier if you can help your child to take responsibility for themselves by setting up little home routines, for example:

- Set a time to share your child's home reading (or spelling/poem) books
- Set up a routine for putting the reader back in the bag
- Have a special place for the library book so there's never a problem finding it
- Let your child know that you want to read and respond to school notices. If you show you value them, your child is more likely to give them to you. They will spend years bringing notices home! Some schools do this on a set day of the week.

You will want to know what is going on at school — but your child may not want to talk about it! If you keep trying to ask a tired child questions, this won't help to build good feelings about school. Try to hold back, and wait till your child wants to tell you about school. Children often play out their experiences. One parent wrote that she had found out all she needed to know by listening at the bathroom door while her daughter in the bath told her dolls all about her day at school.

With a first child at school it is a little bit early to be familiar with the school activities or even classroom ones. Unless one bombards the five-year-old with questions, which he often isn't inclined to answer, knowledge of his new world builds up slowly.

One of the best ways of finding out about your child at school is to get involved yourself. Many schools run parent afternoons after a child has been at school for four to six weeks. It's a chance for teachers and parents to share their views on how a child has settled

in. Be up front with any problems. Some schools have a home book which goes backwards and forwards. Teachers and parents can write in it anything they want to share about children.

Most schools welcome parent helpers for a range of school activities. Teachers are pleased when parents take an active interest in their child's schooling.

Be realistic

Children should be prepared for school positively. But it's also important to be realistic. While it is common for children these days to expect to enjoy school — to look forward to it as a 'cool place' where they will make friends, be happy and learn 'by doing real work' — starting school is not always straight sailing. Children can be scared at the thought of being 'on their own.' Some children will have bad experiences. Busy teachers may be impatient.

Ian came out of the class all smiles and talked non-stop. He asked me straight away if school will be open tomorrow because he wants to go every day it's open. At bedtime he said, 'When I go to sleep I want to dream about school'.

Problems often relate to things outside the classroom. As one child put it:

Not having anyone to play with when my best friend doesn't want to be my best friend.

The behaviour of other children is the single most important cause of anxiety about school. In large schools, five-year-olds starting school are thrust into an environment where there are many more children than they have had to come to terms with before. Older children can be very good at helping young children to settle in. But five-year-olds can also be frightened by the behaviour of older children who may tease, make racist or other nasty comments, or throw away possessions.

Schools are required to be safe places for children. Talk to the teacher if your child is having problems. Be persistent if you are not satisfied.

Some children hate staying at school for lunch, eating sandwiches every day, and find lunchtime not long enough. Others find it hard to accept and fit in with the demands of classroom routine and organisation. Many children complain about having to sit for too long on the mat.

Some parents report that their children just get generally anxious, because they don't know what is expected of them. Despite the best efforts of teachers it is quite common for a five-year-old to be anxious about breaking rules which are not really understood. Why can't they play with friends in other classes? How do they get to use the playground equipment? Why do they have to ask to go to the toilet? Why can't they go outside when they want to? Where, when, and why do they have to line up? They may be worried about getting lost, or being in the wrong place at the wrong time. What is that bell for? Is it playtime, lunchtime or home time? As one child said:

That bell rings all the time. Bells ring in, bells ring out – in, out, in, out, all day long like that.

However, if the playground can be a problem for some, for others the knowledge that they're now going to be able to eat lunch at school is often a very important mark of self-esteem. They enjoy going to school each day because of the chance to be with old friends they used to know at pre-school, and the pleasure of making new friends. Many five-year-olds feel that they've grown up, that at last they've caught up with their older brother or sister!

L'AMOUR

Parent's Diary: Jill

The week before school

As a parent I feel I haven't done enough reading and teaching together with my child. Jill has been very confident since turning five. Very sure of herself. Thought because she is five she can do everything. Not too prepared in letter recognition and sounds, but conversely good with sounds and words. Excited, loves to play with jungle gyms and do art work and make things and chase with friends and generally have fun and be busy.

I feel she may be overwhelmed by too many children and maybe not having all the attention. But I feel she is ready. She needs to be stimulated and kept busy. She has been for a school visit and met her teacher.

I can't wait for my child to start school. Although I have a kindergarten child I will have quite a bit more time to myself.

The first day

First day of school so excited. We were all ready at 8.15am. She was so willing. She was happy for me to leave her there. She didn't want to be told anything. She was acting very confident.

She was excited after school. Showed me her book and was so pleased with herself that she could read it to me. Then she decided later in the afternoon she didn't want to go to school. I ignored it.

The rest of the first week

Next morning she did not want to go to school. It took a lot of talking. I didn't want it to be a negative experience.

We somehow managed to get to school happy. She didn't want me to leave. I stayed a little while. She was sad. She didn't like being told what to do, when to do it and to have to

sit quietly and listen. This mood lasted a few mornings. Also she was very easily upset. If anything went wrong or was difficult to achieve, there was a real tantrum. Tears, hysterics. I just had to leave her to it. Nothing I could say or do would help. She would lose it. So tired I assume, and emotionally drained from trying to be in control and a big girl.

The first day was wonderful for me. I still have a dog and a three-and-a-half-year-old girl, but the day was lovely. So relaxed. Lara went to afternoon kindy, I went for a long walk. But the other days when I left her looking sad it was so awful. I felt so heavy and hurt for her. I knew she would be fine later. Well I thought I knew, well I knew I knew, but deep down that sad face — I didn't really know what was going on in her tiny young brain. I was very relieved to pick her up and see her smiling and excited.

I felt the school teacher was great, strict — reassured me but said it was best to leave Jill and let her get on with it. Once again on the third day I knew in my heart it would not be a good idea to overstay. I knew Jill would be all right eventually and would settle down quicker without my presence so I was relieved to be subtly told that I could go now if I liked.

Jill is so excited every afternoon with her book and getting messages out of her book folder. She loves doing the letter pictures in her exercise book, which is her homework. She is very proud when she finds a picture in a magazine that begins with a particular letter they are studying that week. She is very interested in letters. She writes all these letters and asks me what word she has written. Her best part of the day is the jungle gym.

When I asked her too many questions about school she clammed up. So I found out things during the course of the afternoon or night time. She didn't want to talk about it too much.

I am loving my time. I can also spend more time with Lara and my dog, going for walks. I find the day so long now.

It took Jill until Friday to want to go to school. We talked about the days of the week and she became aware that she wouldn't go to school on Saturdays and Sundays so that helped her. She loves the singing of songs and has a very good memory there. She was quite bossy and authoritative with her sister.

Parents too

Of course, it's not only the child who has to adjust to going to school. Parents have adjustments to make too. If you know your child is ready for school, you'll probably be pleased that s/he's going to learn new skills. But you may also have some worries too. Will s/he make friends at school, will s/he have trouble in the playground, will s/he understand when it's time to eat lunch, will s/he get on

with the teacher, will the teacher have time to explain things? Will s/he be safe? Will s/he cope alone? Parents who didn't like school themselves may be surprised at how well most children these days settle in and enjoy school.

Parents also have their own feelings about their child going off to school. If you've been responsible for your child for five years, you may find it hard to hand that responsibility over to someone you don't know very well for much of the day. It seems as though the school is taking over.

Most teachers believe schools are welcoming places for parents. But you may feel less free to come and go than you did at pre-school. You may not find the same chances to chat about your child to the teacher. Even confident parents can say they felt 'like a new child' themselves. Of course, teachers vary, just as parents and children do. Some are more relaxed with parents than others.

The teacher is one in a million. She talks to you at your own level and tells you quite openly all the bad points about our child as well as all the good ones.

Every time I visit the school I am greeted by name and made to feel I am an individual, not just another mother.

Both parents and teachers have a vital role in helping children settle into school. It's an important process, because experiences in the early stages of schooling can set a pattern for learning.

If you are more upset than you expected on the first day, that's typical. Sit down with a cup of tea or coffee and have a good cry if you feel like it.

I kissed Sarah goodbye and left. I drove straight to another friend and cried my eyes out. I felt much better afterwards. I found it very difficult to concentrate on anything when I got home. I found myself constantly staring into space, thinking about Sarah. She suddenly seemed so small when I left her.

On the other hand, if you feel free at last, that's typical too.

Parent's Diary: Cam

The week before schoo!

The week before Cam goes to school has been fairly hectic as we have had a family funeral and upheavals at work, but Cam is not anxious and is looking forward to his birthday. This event seems to be slightly removed from 'going to school.' We have visited school twice in the last fortnight. The first time, although he is very familiar with the surroundings (two brothers at school), he was very reticent to come inside. The teacher came out and said how much she was looking forward to having him in her class, which was very helpful. He eventually had a look around the class and she let him play on the computer. The Junior area is open plan and Cam has a brother in the J2 area. Although I thought having a brother there would be helpful, in fact I think it has made the transition more daunting as Cam knows he can't yet do what his brother can and feels he will be asked to do things he can't do yet. So we've made no mention of this lately.

On the second visit we arrived early so there were very few children around — much better. Teacher showed us his peg and tote tray already named — good! Still reticent to join in with class 'news' but after 'news' children went to reading. teacher showed him which group he would work with and he achieved more in that half hour of reading and activity sheets than I ever imagined he could. I kept out of the way, this was better for him I think. The teacher said she wanted him to 'feel confident to try' the activities. We stayed all morning through playtime to lunch time. We have one more visit tomorrow which he is looking forward to. He is mostly looking forward to playing with his friends, he says.

Worries: He doesn't always recognise his name. I have decided not to get him a new school bag in case he can't find his peg and doesn't recognise a new bag.

Puts off going to the toilet, hope he gets the hang of this.

Can't eat when he wants — this is different to kindergarten — very little structure at kindy compared to school.

My feelings — happy that he's achieving so well, he's ready for school now. Sorry that I won't have his company but looking forward to new activities that have not been possible with three children (ten years of childrearing).

Regrets — nothing really, I've done all the things with him that I did with the others e.g., swimming, gym, Plunket group, parent helps. I feel satisfied that I've done a good job. I have done much less paid work since he was born, he's had more time with me than the other two probably.

The first day

We had a normal start to the day, Mum and big brothers took Cam to school. Cam was excited about going to school. He knew from his brothers and his visit that he would need a 'book bag.' He already knew he would like a blue one, he was very keen to get to school and purchase this. He knew where his named peg was to hang up his bag (from our visit). He was quiet and subdued but the teacher immediately took all his books and put his name on them. He then said 'When are you going home?' to which I answered 'Would you like me to go now?' and he nodded 'Yes.' 'Would you like a kiss?' 'No.' 'Bye, have a good day,' at which stage I left – no problems, this was before the bell at 8.50am rings.

After school he said school was 'OK quite.' Teacher says he found it a long day. Not keen to read his book tonight or point to words 'It's dumb'! Went to bed early and was quite tired and tearful.

I am very happy with the school's and the teacher's approach and technique with Cam today. Pretty much the sort of day I expected.

The rest of the first week

Leaving him went easily, put book bag and book away, not hanging round me at all, went straight outside to play. Asked me 'Aren't you going soon?'

Quite happy today, says he has 'reading homework' and was keen to read book to me straight away, not too tired.

Thursday: Happy to separate, says it's 'boring' inside, wants to rush outside. Quite familiar with where things go now.

Has book to read and library book.

Friday: Very early today, keen to be there, happy to wait for his friends to arrive.

Has two books to read — keen, spelling 'I,' 'am' — not keen quite tired.

Read books Sunday night, still happy, no problems.

Monday: Still keen. Lovely comments in homework notebook from teacher each night, really helps.

I feel the week has gone extremely well. The teacher is very tuned in and supportive of her students. She understands they have extra needs than those of other students e.g., at 10.15am they get their lunch boxes and bring them into the classroom. She reads a story to them while they eat play lunch before the other children. She makes suggestions about what to eat and what to save for lunchtime.

I am under no illusions about the good separation this week, it may well revert and it did with my second son after the first long holiday but so far so good.

Cam is happy and confident. Didn't we (including family, preschool and school) do a great job!!!

Some useful books

Butler, Dorothy, & Clay, M. (1987). *Reading begins at home.* Auckland: Heinemann.

Clay, M. (1987). *Writing begins at home.* Auckland: Heinemann.

Education Review Office (1997). *Choosing a school for a five-year-old.* Wellington.

Harris, M. (1996). *New Zealand parents' guide to primary school.* Auckland: David Ling Publications Ltd.

Land Transport Safety Authority (1993). *Starting school safely.* Wellington: Land Transport Safety Authority.

Land Transport Safety Authority (1996). *Factsheet : child restrainers.* Wellington: Land Transport Safety Authority.

Ministry of Education (1991). *Reading at home and at school.* (rev. ed.) Wellington: Learning Media.

Cowin, Margaret (1988). *Preparing for school.* (3rd ed.) Victoria: Ministry of Education (Schools Division).

Ministry of Health (1995). *National immunisation strategy 1995.* Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health (1996). *Well Child / Tamariki Ora health book.* Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Nalder, S. (1989). *Reading.* Wellington: GP Books. (A New Zealand Parents' Guide).

Wylie, C. (1996). *Five years old and competent.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Other titles available from NZCER

Your Children: Our Schools. A Guide for Korean Parents in New Zealand *by Margery Renwick*

This study by Margery Renwick was undertaken to help immigrant Korean parents understand the New Zealand education system. It describes the New Zealand system, and makes some comparisons with the Korean one. There are examples of the experiences of Korean children and their parents in adjusting to our early childhood centres and primary schools. These experiences, as described by Korean families living in New Zealand, provide guidance and helpful information for other recent or intending immigrants from Korea. There are also useful perspectives for teachers who have migrant children in their classes and people working with migrant families.

NZCER 1997 • 13221 • Price: $19.80 • ISBN: 1-877140-06-6

Five Years Old and Competent *by Cathy Wylie*

What makes a competent 5-year-old? This book gives a summary of the research report — *Competent Children at 5*. It highlights the impact, shown in the research findings, of the children's family resources and early childhood experiences on the development of their cognitive, social, communicative, and problem-solving competencies. Thought-provoking and very readable.

NZCER 1996 • Price $9.00 • ISBN: 1-877140-05-8

Thinking Children *Anne Meade with Pam Cubey*

How can we help our children to develop their thinking? This recent book from Anne Meade focuses on young children's thinking as they explore mathematical and science related schemas with the support of understanding adults. The children in the study were aged between four and a half and five years.

With increasing interest in schema theory and practice throughout New Zealand and England, this book adds to the understanding and presents this learning theory in a manageable way for practitioners and parents.

Anne Meade is currently Director of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. The Competent Children Longitudinal Research Project described in this book has been her research focus since 1991.

NZCER & VUW 1995 • 13205 • Price $27.00 • ISBN: 0-908916-88-4

Closing the Gaps *Gwenneth Phillips & Pauline Smith*

If children have not yet learned how to read and write, it is because the right way to teach them has not yet been found. This is the basic assumption behind the research by Gwenneth Phillips and Pauline Smith. While the success of the second chance Reading Recovery programme has demonstrated that most of the lowest achieving children in reading and writing after one year at school can be helped to speed up their progress, there is still a small group of children who require additional help. These children need a third chance to learn. This study shows that the hardest-to-teach can achieve and that ways have been developed that can enable them to function with their same-aged peers.

This book is an abridged version of the major research report, *A Third Chance to Learn*, which is also available from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

NZCER 1997 • 13226 • Price: $15.75 • ISBN: 1-877140-15-5

The Benefits of Immersion Education *Peter J Keegan*

Immersion education plays a distinct role in language and cultural revitalisation of Maori and other indigenous peoples. This book summarises research findings on the benefits of immersion education for Maori, their whanau, and their communities. Examples are given from early childhood to school level education.

NZCER 1996 • Price $14.85 • ISBN: 0-908916-95-7

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STARTING SCHOOL

Starting school is a milestone in a child's life. It's a big event for parents and caregivers too. Both teachers and parents have a vital role in helping children settle into school. It's an important process, because experiences in the early stages of schooling can set a pattern for future learning.

Starting School offers guidelines for making the transition to school a positive experience. Topics include choosing a school; visiting the school; enrolment; settling in; clothes and schoolbags; bilingual and immersion classes; the curriculum; classroom organisation; homework; and much more. Parent viewpoints are shared through diaries which record their children's experiences.

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